



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

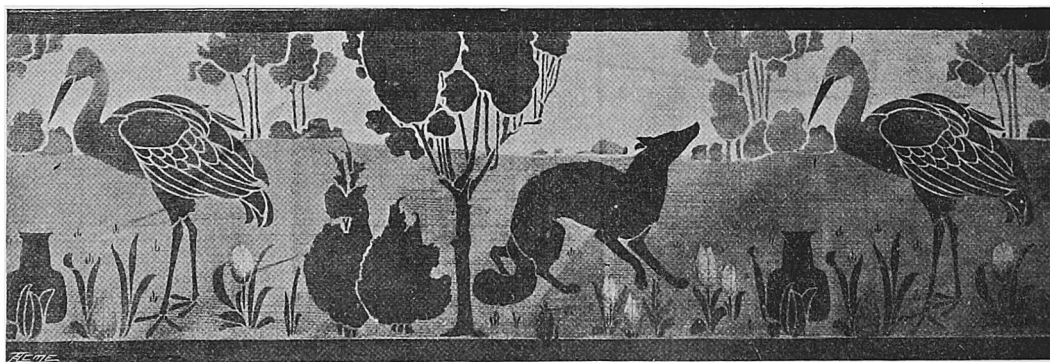
This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



'YOU'RE NOT TAKING ANYTHING'
FRIEZE, STENCILLED ON CANVAS IN OIL COLOUR
WITH TWO PLATES. DESIGNED BY GEORGE R. RIGBY

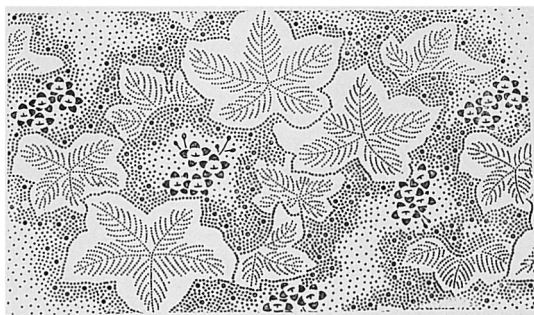
PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY OF
DESIGNERS.

DESIGN FOR STENCIL-
WORK*, BY GEORGE R.
RIGBY, OF UTTOXETER

FIRST PART

THE uses of stencilling are so inconsiderable compared with those of other mechanical or semi-mechanical means of facilitating decoration, and the method has, in this country, attained so little industrial and commercial importance—when compared with printing, for instance—

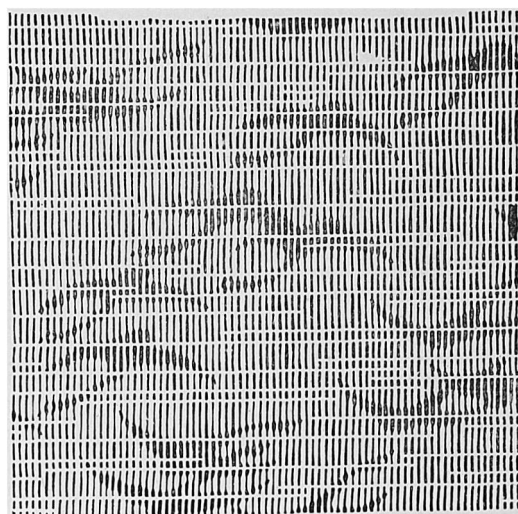
It is admittedly inadvisable to attempt to define the principles which should govern design for any handicraft, without some reference to the work of those who have gone before us, from which we may, if we approach it in the right spirit, learn so much. As, however, the object of these papers is mainly to deal with contemporary work, I shall not spend many words on the history of the art, the more so, as,



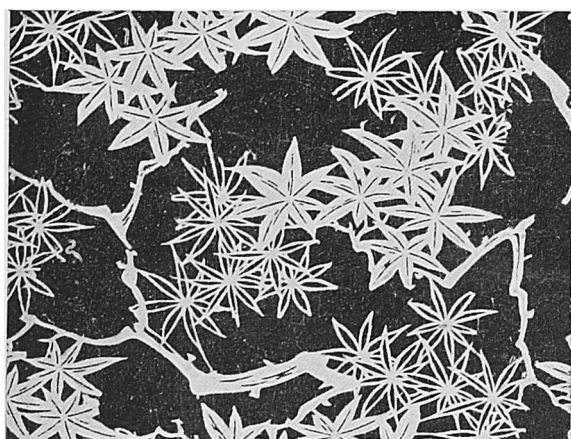
JAPANESE STENCIL
Example of Punched-work.

that at first sight I felt it would be somewhat difficult to treat the subject in such a way as to provide proper material for one of this series of papers. It cannot, however, fail to have some interest if I merely endeavour to give some of the information I have gathered, and some of the ideas that have occurred to me, during my practice in the craft.

* A Paper read before the Society of Designers, at Clifford's Inn, on May 15th, by George R. Rigby, of Uttoxeter.



JAPANESE STENCIL
The Birds in the pattern being formed by a slight thickening of the vertical lines



JAPANESE STENCIL

Example of ground printing, the background in the plate being entirely cut away. The supporting silk threads disarranged by use are visible in this illustration.

as far as I can find out, that history yet remains to be written.

Of course the first and most important work to be mentioned is that of the Japanese. How much we owe to this great people! Japanese stencilling is, to my mind, the only thoroughly successful and considerable use of the craft. They do not appear to have been the inventors, if one is to accept the authority of the late Mr. Tuer. In his book on Japanese stencils he tells us that stencilling is said to have been introduced into Japan by a dyer toward the end of the 17th century, and refers to the character of some Japanese stencils design as having been borrowed from Portuguese and Dutch traders during the 16th and 17th centuries. But we may fairly assume it to be impossible to locate accurately



JAPANESE STENCIL

Illustrates—in the sword-shaped leaves—the use of a conventional tie

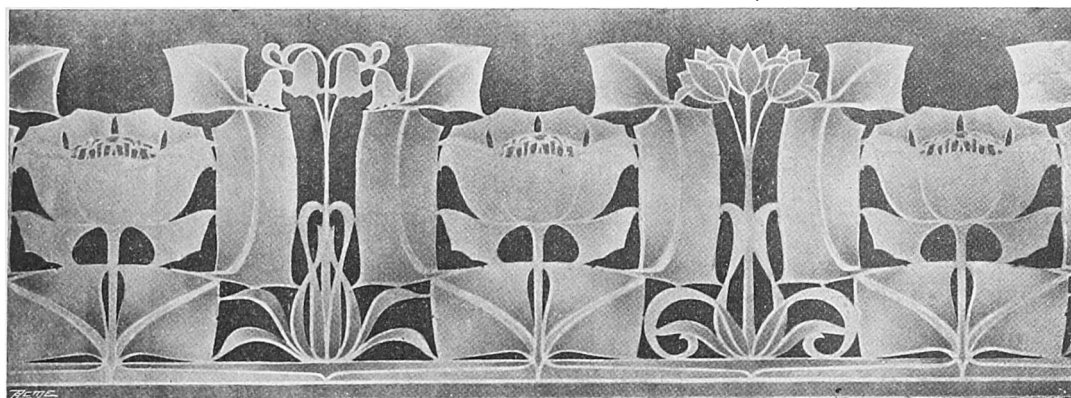
the genesis of these minor methods of decoration.

There is an example of stencil work in the South Kensington Museum—a piece of satin with arabesque pattern stencilled on it in light yellow, described as Italian, very late 18th century—referring to which, Dr. Rock wrote, in the year 1870, ‘to this day stencil ornamentation upon house walls is very much employed in Italy, where papering for rooms is seldom used even as yet and not long ago was in many places unknown.’

There are several other specimens in the Museum; two I saw on linen, described as early 16th century French or Burgundian; and one on canvas, German, late 17th century. But we have not much to learn from these rather rude examples of stencilling.

With the British house-decorator’s use of the art during the present century we are many of us painfully familiar. Whence he borrowed it, or at what time he commenced his cold-blooded practice in it, in our hitherto happy land, I cannot say; but not a few of us have shuddered at the stencilled rosettes and scrolls with which he used to adorn the interiors of churches and other public buildings. Probably the fashion of using stencilling in such buildings was largely due to the Gothic revival in architecture, and the accompanying introduction of purely conventional ornament as a fitting decoration for the Gothic interior; some pattern being necessary to break the crude, hard, painted surfaces.

To come to our own time, this paper would be incomplete if I made no reference to the



‘STANMORE’ FRIEZE, DESIGNED BY HARRY NAPPER

(By permission of Alex. Rottmann & Co.)

DESIGN FOR STENCIL-WORK

charming and important work done by the late Mr. Arthur Silver in conjunction with Mr. Rottmann, and by Messrs. Hayward and Son and other firms, to whom I am indebted for some most instructive examples.

If, in the course of this paper, I appear to dwell at some length on Japanese work, let my excuse be that the most remarkable ingenuity and extraordinary deftness of manipulation displayed by the Japanese in this, as in other handicrafts, and the success which has attended its use in that country—far greater, I believe, than in any other—thoroughly justify me in putting Japanese work first and seeking to draw much of our inspiration as to methods from that source.

And if I depart somewhat from the scope of the title, 'Design for Stencil work,' and seem to treat rather more of actual stencils and stencilling, it should be borne in mind that it is difficult to intelligibly communicate one's ideas on design without carefully considering all the causes and conditions which mould design, such as the craftsmen who reproduce our conceptions, the processes they use, the materials employed, the uses to which the finished work is put, and even the commercial conditions which surround the work and the workers. All these points are, in my opinion, of the greatest interest and of the most vital importance to the designer, and my paper would be childishly inadequate if I attempted to ignore matters which so gravely influence the formation of a national style of design.

To begin, then. As the making of a design for stencil work is to a very great extent indeed influenced by the manner in which the stencil *plate* is to be made, it will be expedient to describe that operation, and to show how many

of the unavoidable conventions of this class of design are thus brought about. And it is desirable to *compare* the English ways of making the plate with the Japanese, and the influences the two processes have on their respective designs.

Mr. Tuer, in his book, gives a most instructive and entertaining description of the Japanese

method, a description so illustrative of the qualities of this wonderful people that I should like to quote in full, but refrain on account of its length. Briefly, the essential points are as follows. The Japanese workman uses, as we do, a waterproofed paper, but of exceedingly thin substance, as many as a dozen sheets being cut at one operation; and in cutting, he invariably pushes the knife before him. The punctured holes or dots, which are such a feature in Japanese stencils, are produced by fine punches. Many of the sheets, when the pattern has been thus cut away, are so fragile that the paper left will not hold them together, and they are strengthened by the final operation of pasting two sheets together and stretching across the plate between the two sheets of paper a number of silk fibres—so fine as not to interfere with the brush-

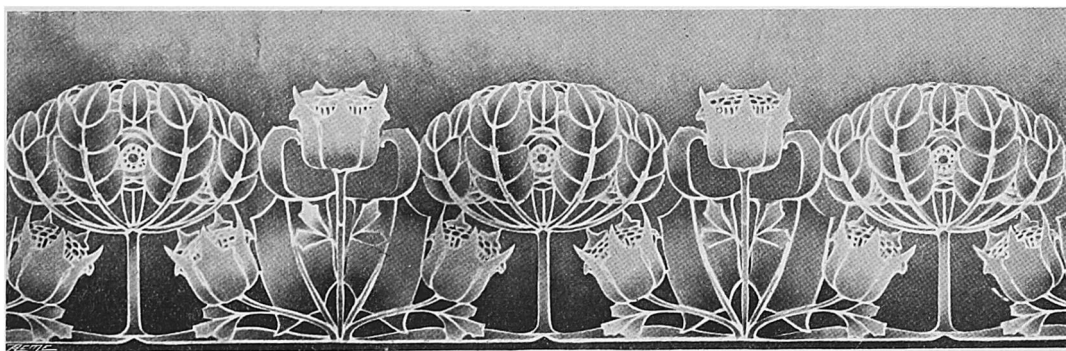
work—in such positions as to afford the maximum of support to the most delicate parts of the ornament. This is an operation requiring the most dexterous manipulation, and is generally carried out with the most exquisite accuracy.

Whether the extremely thin paper used by the Japanese workman affects the character of the design, or whether, conversely, the character of the design has led to the adoption of a thin paper, is a point not to be settled off-hand.



PANEL FOR TWO PLATE STENCILLING
ON VELVET, DESIGNED BY GEORGE R. RIGBY

THE SOCIETY OF DESIGNERS



KINGSBURY' FRIEZE, DESIGNED BY HARRY NAPPER

(By permission of Alex. Ramsay & Co.)

Stencilling in Japan is used most largely for the decoration of dress materials, and this, perhaps, by necessitating designs of small character and delicacy of detail and execution, has given rise to the custom of using a very thin paper in which such objects might be more easily attainable. Again, many of the Japanese designs have the back-ground stencilled, only the fragments of paper composing a light pattern remaining in the stencil plate, and it is possible that in such a design, the plate formed of two thin papers, held together by silk threads, is in reality tougher and more pliable for such fine work than a thick single-sheet plate would be.

The delicate ornamentation of the Japanese often depends largely on the use of spots and lines—quite thin, no thicker than a pencil line. The English craftsman, on the other hand, has a leaning towards broad masses of colour and simpler effects; and to such an extent is this preference indulged in that it is one of his axioms that a practical workman will not attempt to stencil lines. It is, perhaps, worthy of note, moreover, that such broad effects could not easily be worked in the Japanese thin paper, which is not of sufficient substance to withstand the heavy wear which broad work for mural decoration entails

So much for the Japanese method. The English stenciller, in making his plate, goes about his work in a very different way. He never cares to use thin paper, he does not push the knife from him, but draws it towards him, he does not usually cut more than one thickness at a time, and he takes very good care not to cut such designs as need the help of the crossing threads to hold the plate together.

My own method of preparing a plate is somewhat as follows:—The sheet of paper is laid on glass so that the cut shall be perfectly clean on the under surface; the knife used being an ordinary penknife with the rounded point broken off to give a sharp corner to cut with. The kind of paper is a so-called waterproof paper commonly used for lining damp walls; it is of considerable substance. After cutting, the plate is varnished on both sides with ordinary knotting varnish. This dries in a few minutes and the plate is ready for use.

Here let me point out that I have never been able to detect any difference in the prints made from thick and thin plates. I find that the most delicate work the English designer ever wishes for is quite producible by a thick plate, and I think it will be admitted that cutting a single



'CARISBROOK' FRIEZE, STENCILLED ON FLOCK, DESIGNED BY F. G. FROGGATT

(By permission of John Line & Sons.)

DESIGN FOR STENCIL-WORK

stencil plate in thick paper is a much simpler operation than that of the Japanese.

A more important point, however, is that the strength of the English plate enables the stenciller to print an almost unlimited number of copies. I have stencilled as many as 350 copies from one such plate without the plate showing any material signs of wear. It would probably print three times that number without needing more than once or twice re-varnishing.

Talking of the plates leads us naturally to the subject of 'ties,' which must be a most important item in any discourse on stencilling. The difficulty of placing the ties so as to give adequate support to the parts of the stencil plate, and yet not to obtrude upon the artistic effect sought for, is always a very real difficulty with the beginner or the amateur. But, as the old adage says, 'Practice makes perfect,' and your stencil designer of experience rarely has trouble with ties.

It has been the fashion of late years in the schools to 'boldly accept the limitations of your material'—so I think the formula runs. That may be very well, but there is no need for the designer to sacrifice his idea, and fly at the mere approaching *shadow* of a limitation.

It has been argued that as the stained-glass designer finds the lead-line of such great assistance to him in defining his design and producing his artistic effect, so the stencil designer should reap equal benefit from a free use of a conventional tie line. Let me say that what may be sauce for the stained-glass designer is not by any means always sauce for the stenciller. The black lead-line in the glass, falling mainly—as your astute designer puts it—on the contours of the objects in the design, helps the effect by giving a natural roundness to them, and an artistic depth to the strong colour, which is also modified and kept within bounds by such a stern convention. It may be thought that this last quality is to be similarly obtained, to an equal degree, by the regular use of the white line in stencilling. This is not quite the case. It might be so if the white line were always as nearly assimilated to the general tone of the design as the black is to the stained-glass window. But we sometimes wish to stencil deeply and richly-coloured effects, and then, if the designer has swallowed the nostrum of over-boldly—or shall I say, timidly—'accepting the limitations of his material' by using a regular white tie line all through, he will find his design

jumping about in a most annoying manner. Indeed the result too often gives the effect of an unpleasant mass of white worms, which very effectually prevents the beholder enjoying the often beautiful design that has been so disfigured.

The British Decorator, in the dark ages of the Gothic revival, in his amiable incursions into the field of this art, borrowed designs from other crafts instead of having them specially designed for his purpose, and as a consequence had to pepper them freely with ties, in a very—as Mrs. Ramsbottom would say—*promiscuous* manner. He very naturally thought his customers might object to his bright green scroll being most inconsiderately cut in half by a straight hard line of another colour, and, after the pattern was stencilled, he did, most incontinently, paint out the tie. Now, this is a practice I cannot agree with; not that I am afraid of breaking the 'rule of thumb' against mixing one method with another, but simply because it is unnecessary, if you use your brains, and because it generally results in 'blotches.'

The Japanese, now, does just what he feels inclined to do, without worrying about predecessors or critics. In nine cases out of ten he does not bother his little brain about conventional ties, but just makes designs which hang together very comfortably when cut out; or he even goes further, if he feels inclined to do it or his design requires it.

Many Japanese stencil plates have the whole of the ground cut out, the objects forming the pattern remaining suspended in the field of the plate by little more than the hairs or threads which are used for strengthening; and appearing, when printed, as white ornaments on a coloured ground. This is an exercise in legerdemain which I have not often felt moved to try, as a general rule preferring to obtain a coloured ground, by other, to my mind, simpler means. Though, as the Japanese requires his delicate pattern for a flimsy dress material, I do not see what better method he could adopt, if the use of a 'resist' be inconvenient; at any rate, no one can deny him the resultant loveliness.

Again, on the other hand, the Japanese sometimes uses the 'tie' in the boldest manner, to cross an ornament, much in the same way a stained-glass designer runs a lead right across the upright folds of a drapery for instance. We have much to learn from the Japanese.